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JAMES C. ROVELLA
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TESTIMONY OF CHIEF JAMES C. ROVELLA, HARTFORD POLICE
DEPARTMENT
TO THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF
S.B. 54
AN ACT CONCERNING COLLABORATION BETWEEN
BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

February 24, 2014

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee, I am the Chief of Police of the City of Hartford, Connecticut. I have in excess of 32 years of police experience, 21 of those years as a Hartford Police Officer. This testimony is submitted on behalf of the **Hartford Police Department** in support of S.B. 54, *An Act Concerning Collaboration Between Boards of Education and Law Enforcement Personnel*. By requiring schools and police to engage in Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) in communities where police are stationed within their local public schools, this Act fosters the collaboration necessary to ensure police officers do not replace school administrators in administering school discipline resulting in arrests for lower level, non-criminal offenses. It ensures that police stationed within schools stay focused on keeping students safe on a daily basis and not assume responsibility for the oversight of student discipline.

Having already signed and begun the successful implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Hartford Public Schools, the Hartford Police Department can speak from direct experience about the **positive impact S.B. 54 will have on communities where police are stationed within the schools**. The MOU establishes a school-police collaboration team, provides for staff training, outlines the framework a police officer should follow within the school setting when getting involved in student discipline,¹ and identifies the actors responsible for school based arrest reporting and information sharing. However, it is also careful not to interfere with the duties of our officers in situations where a crime or an emergency exists.

Although the MOU was not fully executed until October of 2012, the months leading up to its execution involved great progress as a result of the collaboration between our Department and the Hartford Public Schools. This started at the beginning of 2012 working with the local Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) project in Hartford, which was heading up an effort to reduce the overrepresentation of juveniles of color in

¹ The language in our signed MOU specifies the use of a graduated response model for both HPD personnel and HPS staff. (See copy of MOA attached,)



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the juvenile justice system. As quickly became evident through the data gathered by Hartford's DMC project, students were being arrested in large numbers by the officers in the schools.² In fact, some of the greatest numbers of arrests were occurring at some of Hartford's middle and elementary schools, which we immediately identified as a targeted area for joint police and school intervention and collaboration. Data also showed that the majority of school based arrests were occurring for lower level offenses such as breach of peace, breach of peace second and disorderly conduct.³

We worked with the DMC project and Hartford Public Schools to substantially reduce the school based arrests our officers were making. As we worked on fine tuning the MOU, we implemented a number of initiatives in the interim, all supported by language in the MOU. We increased our force's awareness of school-based arrests, we advised and trained officers on the use of and availability of the Juvenile Review Board and we required all of our officers to attend training on the use of the Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS) as an alternate to arrest. It is important to note that we work very closely with Hartford Public Schools Security and collaborate frequently on any student safety issues that arise, as they have been clearly established as the first responder.⁴ Their presence, supported by HPD community and faith based officers, is the face of safety for Hartford Public Schools, not armed, uniformed HPD officers. Additionally, the collection of and sharing of data was an integral and crucial part of efforts. As a result of all of these efforts, school-based arrests have been drastically reduced and limited to more serious offenses. From the 2011-12 school year to the 2012-13 school year, school-based arrests were reduced by nearly 45 percent.⁵

National stake holders emphasize that inter-agency agreements like our MOU are an essential part of established a successful model for school safety. Such agreements establish appropriate boundaries within the confines of state and federal law, and ensure that the duties of police officers in school support the implementation of

² Nearly 40 percent of all juvenile arrests in Hartford during the 2011-12 school year originated in Hartford Public Schools. Based on data from October 2011- March 2012 provided by CSSD. This number was reduced to less than 10 percent the subsequent school year. Based on data from September 2012 - March 2013 provided by CSSD.

³ Data showed 53 of 91 arrests (58% of all arrests) were for these three offenses. DMC Data Meeting, Hartford Subcommittee, September 8, 2011 p. 9, prepared by Children's Center for Law & Policy and based on data gathered by CSSD.

⁴ Training is a key component of any successful interagency agreement or MOU between police and schools. National Association of School Resource Officers, *Protect & Educate: The SRO and Prevention of Violence in Schools*, October 2012, p. 47.

⁵ Based on data provided by CSSD comparing September 2011-June 2012 to September 2012-June 2013.



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appropriate discipline policies, not overtake them.⁶ We believe Hartford is proof positive of the impact an MOU can have on a community that works together to put school safety first.

Based upon the success that has resulted from our MOU with Hartford Public Schools, we wholly endorse **S.B. 54**. This Act would ensure that towns with police in their schools **work in close concert with one another so that police can focus on keeping their community and children safe, rather than expending limited resources on unnecessary school-based arrests.**

For the foregoing reasons, I urge you to support S.B. 6682, An Act Concerning Collaboration Between Boards of Education and Law Enforcement Personnel. By fostering essential collaboration between our schools and our police, it will ensure that police can focus on keeping our students and communities are safe.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "James C. Rovella".

James C. Rovella,
Chief of Police

Attachment

⁶ See National Association of School Resource Officers, October 2012, pp. 45-49.